

Street video advert kiosks rejected by Edinburgh councillors

Appeals to allow the construction of nine new video advertising boards on pavements in Edinburgh have been struck back by councillors.

Across the UK, BT has been looking to replace their telephone boxes with 'street hubs', which consist of a large pillar in the ground with advertising displays on two sides.

They provide wifi, 5G signal and a free speakerphone accessed through a touchscreen on the side, and give 5% of their advertising screen time over to the council.

BT has tried to get permission to install the kiosks in the capital for seven years, but in almost every case councillors have pushed back on their applications and appeals.

To date, only one kiosk has been approved, on Dalkieth Road near the Royal Commonwealth Pool.

Among the locations BT had appealed were on Potterrow near the Edinburgh University campus, on the Morrison Link near Haymarket Station and on Rayburn Place in Stockbridge.

All nine applications had been referred back to the council after BT was denied planning permission and appealed to the Scottish Government.

In all cases, councillors rejected the kiosks on the grounds that they would harm the visual appearance of the local area.

In some of the appeal rejections, councillors cited additional reasons, such as impact on conservation areas or the kiosks taking up too much space on narrow pavements.

In most of the applications, the telecommunications firm said that they would only remove old telephone boxes in some areas once they could install the new street hubs.

Councillors have long said that this is an attempt to incite them to approve the kiosks, given the poor state of old phone boxes in the city.

Many have been vandalised, and a good number no longer have functional phones inside.

Conservative councillor Tim Jones said: "This is a disgrace. I do not appreciate BT holding us almost hostages to fortune here.

"They are saying that one of the reasons we should accept these hubs is because they will replace telephone boxes which are actually being vandalised.

"Well, actually, they can easily solve that problem by removing the telephone boxes without making these applications.

"They have that within their power, so I do not find that a very valid argument for installing these particular hubs."

SNP councillor David Key said: "The applicants make much of the community benefits of these structures. Personally, I see no community benefit whatsoever."

Liberal Democrat councillor Hal Osler, convener of the body that considered the appeal, said: "To me, there is a very careful line here that we do have to take.

“I don’t think we’ve gotten the point across that this is an additional clutter on pavements that is an additional sort of distraction for individuals. It is a stand alone.

“I’m very hesitant about granting anything that would increase the level of confusion and clutter on our pavements. I do understand that we have to improve our digital inclusion, but I do believe there’s other ways we can do it.

“They’re not putting these hubs exactly where the phone boxes are, which are tucked away. They are choosing to put them in a very prominent location.”

By Joseph Sullivan Local Democracy Reporter